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SUBJECT: PRESIDENT URIBE SPEAKS TO REID DELEGATION ON TPA,  
LABOR, AND CHAVEZ

REF: BOGOTA 008224

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SUMMARY  
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1. (SBU) During a November 28 meeting with the U.S. Congressional Delegation led by Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, President Alvaro Uribe outlined Plan Colombia's accomplishments and stressed the importance of continued U.S. support. Uribe said passage of the U.S.- Colombia Trade Promotion Agreement (TPA) would attract vital investment to Colombia and show U.S. political support for its best ally in the region. Uribe said his recent dispute with Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez occurred because Chavez violated Colombia's institutional hierarchy by directly contacting Colombian Army Commander Mario Montoya. Uribe claimed that Chavez had expansionist plans for his model of "new socialism," and likened the threat Chavez poses to Latin America to that posed by Hitler in Europe. END SUMMARY.

2. (U) Participants:

UNITED STATES

Ambassador William R. Brownfield  
Senator Harry Reid, Majority Leader, D-NV  
Senator Thad Cochran, R-MS  
Senator Jeff Bingaman, D-NM  
Senator Byron Dorgan, D-ND  
Senator Mike Crapo, R-ID  
Senator Robert Menendez, D-NJ  
Senator Kent Conrad, D-ND  
Mike Castellano  
Anna Gallagher  
Marcel Lettre  
Federico De Jesus  
Serena Hoy  
Col. Mike Barbero  
Deputy Political Counselor, Julie Chung  
Adam Lenert, POL (note-taker)

COLOMBIA

President Alvaro Uribe  
Vice Minister of Foreign Relations, Adriana Mejia

Vice Minister of Defense, Juan Carlos Pinzon  
Minister of Trade, Luis Guillermo Plata  
Ambassador to the U.S., Carolina Barco  
Director of National Planning, Carolina Renteria  
Vice Minister of Labor, Andres Palacios  
High Commissioner for Reintegration, Frank Pearl  
High Commissioner for Accion Social, Luis Alfonso Hoyos  
Ministry of Foreign Affairs North Americas Desk, Patricia Cortes

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CONTINUED PLAN COLOMBIA SUPPORT VITAL  
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13. (SBU) Asked by Senator Menendez if the time had arrived to shift U.S. assistance from traditional Plan Colombia programs towards alternative development and justice-sector projects, Uribe said that Colombia had done much under Plan Colombia, but more remains to accomplish. The GOC controlled only fifty percent of its territory in 2000, but now maintains a presence in every municipality. Spraying and manual eradication programs supported by the U.S. would destroy over 200,000 hectares of coca in 2007. Uribe said to maintain security and continue the fight against narco-trafficking, the U.S. must continue its vital support.

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GOC INVESTING IN JUSTICE AND ALTERNATIVE DEVELOPMENT  
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14. (U) Uribe said his government had committed to justice programs and alternative development. He explained how the GOC had passed important judicial reforms and almost doubled

the budget for the justice system over the past four years. He noted that Colombia began producing biofuel, and expanded coffee production by over one million bags over the last five years. Uribe reminded the Senators of the difficulty of alternative development in a country with over 50 percent jungle terrain (578,000 square kilometers). He explained that the GOC's Forest Families program works to secure the jungle by employing rural families to patrol and report illicit activity.

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EXTRADITIONS ARE NON-NEGOTIABLE  
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15. (SBU) Uribe explained that after he met with families of hostages held by the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and spoke with French officials about the release of French-Colombian hostage Ingrid Betancourt, he dropped his original position that he would not discuss a humanitarian exchange with the FARC unless it coincided with a broader peace process. Despite pressure from Chavez and others, he had insisted that any humanitarian exchange include the three American hostages. In contrast, the GOC would not support the inclusion of extradited FARC members in the U.S. He explained that Colombia had extradited over 650 criminals to the U.S. to date, a level of cooperation with U.S. justice unprecedented anywhere else in the world. "For us, extradition is a policy that is non-negotiable," he stated.

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TPA WILL BRING INVESTMENT, SHOW SUPPORT  
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16. (SBU) Senator Crapo asked for Uribe's views on the TPA and labor unionists' concerns. The President said the TPA was economically important for his country, because it would help Colombia attract foreign investment. He said the TPA would probably not have a large immediate impact in increasing Colombian exports to the U.S., but with increased foreign investment, their export sectors could develop to be more competitive in U.S. markets. Uribe said the TPA was also important for political reasons, since it would show U.S. support for its best ally in the region. "I don't know how I

could explain to my nation and the international community why the best friend of the U.S. was not granted a TPA," he said.

17. (SBU) Uribe said his government had made great efforts at improving the situation of labor unionists. In the past, 256 unionists were killed in a single year. In 2007, 30 unionists had been killed to date, and investigations and prosecutions were underway. Since 2002, the Prosecutor General's Office has prosecuted 56 cases of labor violence, sending 118 people to prison. In the majority of cases, Uribe said, the killer was not linked to the unionists' employers, but rather to terrorist groups that suspected the union members were helping rival gangs. The GOC has protected over 6,000 people in 2007, at a cost of nearly USD 40 million, including over 1200 unionists. Uribe said there

were many private sector unions that disagreed with the large labor confederations' criticism of the TPA. He held regular lunches with the large labor confederations to discuss labor issues, but noted that they would never accept the TPA due to their ideological opposition to free trade and the United States.

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URIBE: CHAVEZ POSES THREAT TO REGION  
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18. (SBU) Asked by Senator Conrad to comment on President Chavez, Uribe said he prefers to be prudent in statements about the leader of this significant trading partner. He had authorized opposition Senator Piedad Cordoba and Chavez to facilitate talks with the FARC on a humanitarian accord after the families of the hostages implored him to do so. He recognized this was taking a great political risk, but saw Chavez as perhaps the only person respected enough by the FARC's leaders to reach an agreement to release the hostages.

19. (SBU) Uribe then reviewed the events that led him to suspend Cordoba's and Chavez' roles as facilitators. He said that in an October 12 meeting, Chavez told him that he wanted to meet with FARC leader Marulanda in Colombia. Uribe told him this could only be done if the FARC released an initial group of hostages, with a commitment to release the rest later. The meeting would also have to be conducted at a specific demilitarized point, not a general zone as proposed by Chavez. To Uribe's surprise, Chavez publicly announced in Paris that Uribe had given him approval to meet with Marulanda in Colombia without mentioning any of the conditions set in their prior meeting. Uribe saw this as a violation of trust which put in question Chavez' reliability as a facilitator.

110. (SBU) Uribe said the final factor that caused him to terminate Chavez' mandate as a negotiator was Chavez' call to Colombian Army Commander Montoya, despite Uribe's earlier specific instructions not to contact his military officials. Uribe stressed several times that this was "a violation of our institutional hierarchy," explaining he had a duty to defend democratic values. Uribe said Chavez was trying to create a "personal empire," and had expansionist plans in the region for his model of "new socialism." Chavez' model violated democratic values such as freedom of the press, local elections, and independence of the Central Bank. He likened the threat Chavez poses to Latin America to that posed by Hitler in Europe.

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URIBE SEEKS SUPPORT FROM OTHER PRESIDENTS  
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111. (SBU) Uribe mentioned he would see Chavez in Ecuador on November 29 at President Rafael Correa's inauguration ceremony of the new constitutional assembly. He said it would be a difficult trip, but a necessary one and he would not leave the stage exclusively to Chavez. In recent weeks, Uribe saw positive movements by Correa away from Chavez-type

radicalism, and he was not sure which way the Ecuadorian leader would lean. Uribe said he also called several other Latin American presidents to seek their support. Uribe said: "I do not want to leave political space for Chavez alone."

112. (U) This cable has been cleared by Senator Reid.

Nichols